

The role of planners in public open space production in contemporary African cities: a reinjection of the social agenda in planning practice

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Abstract

African cities face challenges of delivering quality public open spaces within set time frames, under constrained budgets, varying levels of political will and professional capacity. These challenges in conjunction with the ‘emotional’ conundrum faced by planners, continue to define the roles of planners and prohibit them from confronting the status quo. This paper argues that the planning profession needs to acknowledge that; to respond to the challenges of contemporary African public open space, an intentional deliberate paradigm is required. This paradigm requires a spatial imagination to reconcile the disjuncture between the static place of planners and the active space of citizens.

Keywords: The planner,; emotion; deliberative planning practice; contemporary African public open space; active citizenship

Introduction

Public open spaces emulate multi-layered aspects of historic and cultural differences, which harness the spirit and essence of contemporary African cities. This paper argues that public open spaces mirror the crux of the planning profession, its thinking, its emotion and ability to deliberate. As many countries experience rapid urbanization, urban planning systems continue to face high levels of cultural, socio-economic and spatial diversity, placing the professional planner in a peculiar position. This paper investigates the role of planners in public open space production in contemporary African cities, and opportunities for a reinjection of the social agenda in planning practice, making use of the case of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa.

The city of Tshwane is the capital city of South Africa. It consists of an amalgamation of 13 municipalities and is located in both the Gauteng and North West Provinces. The city is well known for its concentration of educational, research and foreign institutions which attract internal and external migration, making it a melting pot of diversity. During the apartheid regime, Tshwane formally known as Pretoria was regard as the ‘ideal apartheid city’. It implemented strict zoning laws and centrally controlled its public open spaces in the name of restricting social cohesion and integration amongst its black and white population (Horn 2000). Moreover, the city also restricted the development of public open spaces in its black areas (known as townships) in effort to discourage gathering and community building (Lategan and Cilliers 2014). This central approach to governing the public realm represented a government that was intolerant of local ideas, experiences, and knowledge, thus no participation or

consultation with communities were held with regard to public open space provision processes. The City of Tshwane has, however, since the first democratic election of the country in 1994 rebranded itself as a city with equal access and opportunities for all. It now upholds the values of its communities and is striving to activate an active citizenship (City of Tshwane vision 2055, 2013).

Unfortunately, the legacy of the apartheid rule remains imprinted in the city's spatial geography and in some aspects, its institutional culture (Strauss 2019. Shackleton and Gwedla 2021). Optimistically, the city has over the years shown great strides to reconstruct its landscape. More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, the city has prioritized its 'townships' in areas of public open space design and provision in effort to promote social integration and repair the injustices of the past (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, 2005). Therefore, this paper analyses the City of Tshwane as a case study with the focus on these three key questions:

- a. How are planners' perceptions of the evolving civic, socio-economic practices, needs, demands, and context of public open spaces incorporated in the management and design of public spaces?
- b. How do public space planning processes accommodate/include former 'townships' and their local ideas in decision-making and design of public spaces?
- c. How does the existing institutional context of planning processes of management and design of existing public spaces implicate on deliberative practices?

The paper takes the position that for planning to respond to the challenges of contemporary African public open space and its future vision, an intentional deliberate paradigm is required. This paradigm requires a spatial imagination that will reconcile the disjuncture between the static place of planners and the active space of citizens. Therefore, the paper locates planning processes within the central ideas of deliberative theory, as inspired by Jurgen Habermas, highlighting the central ideas and impediments' on practice. Thereafter, the paper makes reference to the role of the planner, the importance of planners' awareness and the compelling rational identity required in this deliberative paradigm shift. The paper then proceeds with the methodology applied. Finally, the research findings are discussed under the following themes: rediscovering the centre, defensible space, pseudo representation and the call for planners to re-set the agenda. Research across the aforementioned themes suggest that the planning profession needs to acknowledge that; to cultivate a deeper understanding of the role of planners in contemporary African public open space, an intentional deliberate paradigm is required.

Literature review/summary

In an attempt to locate the role of the planner in the central ideas of deliberative theory, this section begins with an overview of deliberative theory, its relevance to planning, and its implications on public open space planning processes. Central to this review is the question, 'what is the deliberative paradigm? What does it necessitate in planning? and how can planners shift their perspective in public open space production processes?' Drawing on the history of planning, this section also unpacks the planner's role, awareness and identity and locates it within the framework of deliberative theory in an attempt to build an understanding of the opportunities for a reinjection of the social agenda in planning practice.

Understanding deliberative planning in the context of public open space production

The concept of Deliberative Theory is one that has been popularly associated with the political thinker and philosopher Jurgen Habermas. Habermas was concerned with the ideas around fair procedures and processes surrounding public participation and decisions made in society regarding societal and political matters. Deliberative theory requires the sharing of information and equal consideration, respecting the heterogeneity of populations and the value of merits in argumentation (Fishkin 2011). The central idea within the ideals of deliberative theory is that; policy decisions made need to incorporate different ideas and perspectives from different and/or opposing social agents, citizens and institutions. In light of space production, this would entail the direct involvement of communities in the design processes and governance of their public open spaces, by sharing opinions and directing the agenda.

Several scholars vary in their views of deliberative theory and ultimately how it can be applied in different projects (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008; Fishkin 2011; Perna 2017). Therefore, there is a constant need to distinguish between the varieties in the approaches to the application of deliberative theory. For example; (1) the World Wide Views, implemented in Denmark, which focuses on global citizen participation and opinion on governance issues (Blue and Medlock 2014), (2) Citizens' Initiative Review, implemented in The United States to collect signatures from randomly selected citizens which result in legally binding referendums that are used to influence voting behaviour (Ryan and Smith 2014), (3) Deliberative Poll, where randomly selected citizens participate in a questionnaire and deliberate in small groups on opposing issues (Fishkin 2011; De Vries et al. 2011). These different approaches are applied in different matters, for instance, healthcare, housing shortages, climate change, minority rights and education policies amongst others.

Amongst some of the popular approaches are two presented by Button and Mattson (1999). The scholars have categorized various applications into two categories, which they refer to as micro- and macro-deliberative theory. In relation to the latter, deliberation occurs on a broad scale in which people can engage in social and political matters that concern them in any way and through any platform, for example, through social media. This can be linked to Kingston (1998) six-step ladder to achieving the ideals of communicative theory and is based on ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems) or the World Wide View approach where people can communicate virtually on a larger and broader scale. This form of deliberation does not emphasize face-to-face interaction, nor is it designed to yield a specific decision; rather, it is able to influence broader social thinking and collective decisions (Button and Mattson 1999. Lafont 2015). Micro deliberation on the other hand refers to deliberation on a specific issue that leads to a specific decision made with regard to that issue. This deliberation is in the form of a small affected and interested group that come together face to face to discuss and/or debate to reach a specific resolution. According to Lafont (2015) micro-deliberation concerns directly affected citizens regarding local issues such as the allocation of a city's budget, the operation of a school, or the development of a park. Micro deliberation is what will be referred to in this paper, as that is the form of deliberation that communities and planners participate in, in matters related to public open space design and production on a neighbourhood scale.

Paradigm shift towards deliberative planning in Africa

In the past two decades' planners have witnessed challenges in light of the deliberative quest, particularly in South Africa. In the dawn of democracy, 1994, South Africa had to move away

from its rigid, top down and blue print ways of planning and designing for communities and embrace a more pluralist bottom-up approach that embraces diversity and local knowledge (Coetzee 2012). This shift in the paradigm and the narrative of planning signified the importance of injecting the social agenda into planning processes and awakening the need for society to inform planning through deliberation. This is captured in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The constitution requires all institutions of the state to mainstream the participation of citizens in all its programmes. As the supreme law of the land, all other policies and legislation in the Republic now abide by this. Providentially, this paradigm shift is not only peculiar to South Africa because of its apartheid history but to other African countries such as; Ghana and Kenya, who have also signified a character shift in planning and design that has moved away from technical and professional glorification to more plural and participatory approaches (Mensah et al. 2016). The United Nations conference on Environment in 1992 through its Agenda 21 played a vital role in influencing values and approaches around activating local citizenship in seeking sustainable development worldwide. These approaches involve the engagement with local communities in the name of accessing local knowledge and resources, cultivating local buy in, encouraging cooperation and smooth implementation of programmes and projects.

Within the light of micro deliberation and in the case of public open space production, this process can be regarded as one which brings the affected community together (neighbourhood). The aim is to discuss their needs in relation to public open space development, to provide reasons for those needs and to ultimately debate on the terms wherein different perspectives can be shared and a decision on what needs to be done can be made. This process requires the equal participation of all those interested and affected, moreover, the idea is that all present will get the opportunity to speak and to generate informed and considered opinions. This signifies what Habermas (2015) calls the 'ideal speech situation' which essentially brings one to the premise of reflective participation, where viewpoints have the opportunity to change. Ercan and Dryzek (2015) argue that this is achieved through the acknowledgement of human rights and the respect for equal participation in societal/political matters guided by the norms of equality.

In this deliberative process, citizens exchange ideas and different claims that are then considered, in the name of securing the public good. This process is also linked to the theory of public reason by John Rawls (1997a), who advocates for the use of reason where decisions are made. According to Rawls (1997a), reasoning brings different perspectives together and puts them under public scrutiny. Lafont (2015) posits that it is for this reason that micro deliberation and public reason are assumed to work hand in hand, because the ideal speech situation requires public reasoning in support or against arguments and decisions. According to Rawls himself, reason is a vital ingredient for deliberative processes (Rawls 1997b). However, Saward (2002) argues that although reason and deliberation are thought to diminish self-interest and spark the desire for the realization of the common good, this may be hindered by different socio-cultural contexts.

Scholars such as Button and Mattson (1999), Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) and Parkinson (2012) have in their own ways suggested that Habermas followed a proceduralist approach towards the idea of deliberation. According to McAfee and Noëlle (2008), deliberative theory does not call for universal agreement, rather the emphasis is on fair and legitimate processes, even in conflict. One can easily draw to this conclusion as deliberative theory accentuates the value of the process in decision making and not necessarily the decision arrived at (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). This is largely encapsulated by the idea that decisions made in society

are not static and that society should not see them as fixed. The idea is that the decisions made can also be challenged and debated through the same processes in which they were initially arrived at. Murchland (1996) describes this as an open-ended process that does not require closure. However, those involved in the process have the responsibility to debate, to criticize and comprehend, to influence and to persuade despite the inevitable presence of power relations in a society (Ferree et al. 2002). Saward (2002) argues that this proceduralist approach is what differentiates Habermas to Rawls, as Rawls focuses on the limits on how to reason rather than a process of actual reasoning in public.

Deliberative theory is thus imperative in the ever-evolving multi-layered communities characterized by difference and changing needs because it acknowledges the importance of an iterative process that is vital in planning for diversity in contemporary African cities. Moreover, it is necessary to consider when making decisions regarding the management and design of public space, as such spaces require an understanding and acknowledgement of different interests and perspectives that have implications on different uses and activities.

Situating deliberative theory: the impediments' on practice

Regrettably, this ideal of deliberative planning on a micro level is not without challenges or criticism. Backer (2017) locates his criticisms in four broad categories; (1) giving reasons, he argues that individuals who participate in deliberative processes have feelings and desires that may impede on their reasoning, and this is not acknowledged in the theory, (2) willingness to listen to others, he argues that individuals do not form a homogenous group, as such, some may be sexist, classist, and racist amongst others, which hinders them from listening to different perspectives, (3) consensus, Backer contends that it would be injudicious to assume that participants are likely to agree on what is sensible as individuals have antagonistic ways of viewing the world, (4) language is ideology, much like consensus, Backer argues that language presents a challenge in micro-deliberative processes because of how 'what is said, thought, and heard registers participants' imagined relations to real social conditions, and these imagined relations are alive and at work during discussion, rather than bracketed' (Backer, 2017: 5). Therefore, deliberative processes are challenged by unconscious drives, identities, and metanarratives.

Over and above the procedural challenges of deliberation discussed by Backer (2017) are legitimacy challenges presented by Parkinson (2003). Parkinson argues that deliberation is often associated with the merits and legitimacy of programmes and projects. He argues that in some instances those in institutionalized decision-making positions are accused of misusing this process for their own gain, and not the harnessing of local ideals and opinions. This is predominantly in cases where the process of deliberation is used to fulfil the agendas of some and not necessarily to serve its designed purpose (Gutmann and Thompson 1996). For example, how those in power manipulate the process of deliberation to create a sense of pseudo legitimacy and authenticity in planning projects. This is done in forms of tick-box exercises wherein project managers can report to their seniors that the deliberative processes were initiated and facilitated. As such, critical opinions have argued that micro deliberation is only effective if it is practiced inside the court room, where reason and argumentation are legitimate (Perna 2017).

Undoubtedly, deliberative processes also face challenges in situations where there are socio-cultural or power hierarchies. According to Curato et al. (2017), culture and tradition create hierarchies in social structures that perpetuate the silencing of minorities or, in diverse societies

with competing interests and perspectives. Therefore, deliberation works undemocratically for it excludes those who are minorities. A similar critique has been raised by Mouffe (2000), who argues that deliberative processes undermine culture, emotion and passion, where those who cannot express themselves rationally or without empirical evidence are sidelined. Moreover, deliberative processes are talk centric and according to Mendelberg (2002), talk can lead to pathologies which do not yield clear directives of how to move forward, as such Curato et al. (2017), argue that deliberative processes are problematic because of how discussions are not easily differentiated from deliberation. Correspondingly, De Vries et al. (2011, 3) argues that 'what happens as people deliberate' to assess and measure its quality.

Amidst the above challenges and critics of the practical viability of deliberative processes in different contexts, some scholars have argued for its successes and that it offers innovative institutional proposals (Curato et al. 2017; Lafont 2015; Parkinson 2012). Parkinson (2003) argues that although deliberative processes are faced with practical challenges, and sometimes reduced to mere forms of participation, one can argue that they benefit from these competing interests and perspectives as they provide valuable information and a lens into the 'other' (citizens) only if they are brought forward. Hendriks (2016) argues that deliberative processes do influence policies, while Parkinson and Mansbridge (2012) argue that they foster debates and promote democracy. The ultimate goal of taking up this micro approach, particularly in public open space planning processes is to ensure the realization of authentic spaces that are a representation of opinions on the ground, to ensure active citizenship and overall better outcomes in urban form, function and experience.

The planner: the nexus of contemporary African open space

The demand on Public open spaces in the 21st century to navigate and accommodate new lifestyles for future city life within contemporary African cities poses a challenge for professional urban planners. Public open space debates are characterized by its role to achieve urban integration, be inclusive and embrace diversity. According to Thompson (2002), 'the idea of cultural differences [within public open space has] become homogenised within an overriding expression of national culture [which] has largely been replaced with a more pluralistic ideal'. This pluralistic ideal is contested by Sandercock (2000) as she urges the planning profession to move away from mere pluralistic acknowledgement towards uncovering what is meant by and how to manage people's 'co-existence in cities of difference'. The role of the planner has evolved from locating itself within one extreme of addressing societal needs through technical, rigid, and blueprint means; to another extreme which encapsulates the change within planners' perception of their role through taking a socio-political, relational approach when addressing changing societal needs (Albrechts 2004; Burchell and Sternlieb 1978; Briassoulis 1999). However, in the beginning of the 21st century, the fixation around the communicative strategic planning shift within urban planning, as the 'solution', has deceived planning practice (Kunzmann 2013), as this kind of planning pre-empted the technical traditions of planning processes and the organizational form/means remain elusive.

In our attempt to move away from mere 'pluralistic' acknowledgement of open spaces, this paper questions how intentional and deliberate planners are within their involvement in planning processes when encountered with public open spaces of difference. Moreover, how can deliberative planning practices influence day to day management and provision of these spaces designed for diversity.

Understanding ‘difference’ within public open spaces lies at the heart of understanding the evolving communities, which deliberative practices can tackle through the sharing of opinions and information. Public spaces in South Africa have gone through physical and legislative changes since the attainment of democracy in 1994, however some of these spaces remain contentious due to the symbolic meaning that they hold for different people. This has influenced the different ways in which public open spaces are understood and experienced by different communities (Landman 2018). Fataar (2017), argues that public spaces in South Africa perpetuate social division because of how they are representative of some and unwelcoming to others. Furthermore, he argues that the only remedy is understanding local needs and ensuring spatial, social and economic integration to build cohesion, sense of belonging and inclusivity. Therefore, planners are faced with the challenge of producing integrated spaces that accommodate the multi-dimensional nature and needs of an evolving South African society.

Simone (2004) alludes to the imagined urban functional spaces being open-ended as it allows for multiplicity of relations, which further allows for open-ended spatial imageries. He further specifies that African cities are dynamic as a result of the ‘natural’ heterogeneous configuration; this, he argues, is not in response to mimicking the Global North, in contrary it is ‘as specific routes to a kind of stability and regularity that non-African cities have historically attempted to realize’ (Simone 2004). This stabilizing feature of African urban spaces produced by an evolving sense of community begins the conversation about how perceptions around the make-up of African Open spaces are misunderstood and therefore deliberation is required to influence their contextual understanding and ultimately improve their management structures.

Planners’ personal awareness

The role of planning is described as a ‘multidimensional and multifaceted profession with sensitivity toward class, race, sex, and culture. This makes planning a multicultural canon’ (Burayidi 2000). Thus, planning is a democratic, reflective and deliberative process that seeks to restructure the urban landscape through active collaboration and participation with the community. Modernist planning sought to impose uniformity, which resulted in the extraction of cultural identity from the urban landscape and urban form. Consequently, how planners think and manage the dispersion of culture into the urban form and landscape becomes pertinent in the 21st century. Baum (2015) puts forwards a different understanding of planners, not just as shaping the urban form but understanding what motivates them. In addition to this, he asserts the importance of the positioning of their minds, and how this positioning through deliberative interventions can change people’s behaviours’. He further states that planners have failed to consider the emotions behind people’s behaviour, when proposing interventions.

Ferreira (2013) insists that planners are in denial about their profession being ‘emotionally loaded’. The detachment of planners and their emotions is an entry point in helping us understand deliberative and reflective planning practices. Hence, the question becomes why should planners be more emotionally engaged? In order to understand the need to be emotionally engaged, the paper defines what is meant by ‘emotions’. For purposes of this paper emotions are defined as ‘mental events (normally) associated with some form of physiological arousal and (normally) associated with specific “action tendencies”’ (Ferreira 2013). An example of this would be, when confronted with fear your body releases adrenaline, which results in a response that is characterized by either flight or fight response. Planners are faced with institutional, professional and political pressures which in turn confine them to functional and rational models of engagements. Interestingly enough the misconceived underpinnings that

emotion is misguided and hinders clarity and logic and rational- technical approaches deems more objective and gives greater clarity, is contested by Hoch (2006) as he states that emotion has the tendency to lead to rationality which promotes greater clarity.

The planning process is intricate process that involves people with diverse backgrounds and cultures, thus it requires both rational and emotional action. The emphasis of 'emotions' in planning theory and practice have been underestimated, as this gap helps to uncover a greater emotional awareness within daily planning processes. Even though, Mouffe (2000), critiques deliberative processes for undermining social realities, ideas of a micro-deliberative agenda require planners to reckon themselves by shifting from 'us (the planner) and them (the community)' to 'us'. The collective 'us', moves the emphasis of being on mere participation process (Parkinson, 2003), to recognizing everyone in the process as being fully (rational and emotional) present and responsible in deliberating and in so doing, achieving certain spatial outcomes. In light of the aforementioned, returning to understanding dimensions of culture within the urban landscape, for planners it is easy to revert to conventional theoretical frameworks as a vantage point. However, when it comes to multi-layered cultural experiences or public open spaces especially within developing countries; how the planners' personal emotional awareness impacts on the cultural interface is imperative when starting to rethink how public open spaces are managed and designed.

Planners' 'rational' identity

Todes (2011) urges for new approaches of planning not to fall in pitfalls of becoming "best practices" that remains far removed from social and institutional contexts. Yiftachel (1995) states that planning theory and practice over the years has revolved around two questions; what is a good city? What is good planning? There has been a shift to a more complex view and understanding to the city and spatial planning in the 21st century (Todes 2011), from a persistent understanding of 'planning as reform' (Yiftachel 1995) to a reform of planning. This shift, in African cities (Simone 2004), requires a relational (Massey and Massey 2005) and provisional (Hillier 2017) conception of space in order to redress pre-conceived ideas around how cities ought to be structured or restructured by planning. Moreover, pull apart assumptions concerning the spatial functioning of cities and what professionals think peoples' needs are (Todes 2011). The disjuncture between the calculated/static place of planners and the socially active space of citizens, is reinforced by planners who Coetzee (2012) terms "old style planners" [who] are still caught up in the archaic, rigid, autocratic and control-oriented mindset'. This mentality is deeply entrenched within the limitations set out by institutional and political dynamics. Furthermore, Coetzee (2012) brings emphasis to the difficulty and struggle for planners to emancipate themselves from this dominant mindset. Moreover, he emphasizes that even though the system should be refined if the necessary mindset required is not obtained the necessary change cannot be achieved. Critical to urban planning methodology is planners' ability to relate with stakeholders and think, however planners' fixation on 'rationality' has misguided their judgement on the pertinent dynamics of social experiences, social activities and lived realities (Baum 2015). Thus, the 'rational identity' (Baum 2015) of planning has created a barrier between evolving urban spaces and planners desired vision. Thus, the drive behind a reformed planning system lies at the heart of the professional planners' ability to have a paradigm shift with how culture, emotion, difference, transformation can be deliberated, internalized and translated into practice, by moving beyond the rational model.

Active citizenship has taken on a critical role in the progression of planning thought. According to Miraftab and Wills (2005) 'active citizenship' has been one of the many definitions that have

resulted from the reconceptualization of citizenship in the 21st century. Active citizenship seeks to go “beyond ‘taking up invitations to participate’ in what Cornwall calls ‘invited’ spaces of citizenship, they extend to forms of action that citizens innovate to ‘create their own opportunities and terms of engagement’ (Miraftab and Wills 2005). However, this alternative model of citizenship assumes favourable facilitation conditions, which so often is not the case, due to planning institutional barriers that prohibit creativity and the lack of professionals that understand citizenship rationale.

Reverting back to the ‘rational identity’, planners are not only instrumental in solving problems for communities. However, they are also instrumental in sharing their expert knowledge with communities, which in many cases still underpin traditional top-down conceptions of citizenship (Miraftab and Wills 2005). Thus, what appears apparent is the inability of planning processes and management systems to keep up to speed and adapt to the rapid evolving urban landscapes, diverse urban formations and alternative forms of citizenship. According to Oteng-Ababio and Grant (2019), part of the problem is the way in which planners pathologise communities, which results in policy formulation and design ideas that are not adequately suited for the kind of spaces African cities present (Kamete 2013). Thus, the union between planning and micro-deliberative thinking becomes imperative in breaking down tensions inherent in planning approaches, in order to mediate deliberative outcomes suited for African public open spaces (Oteng-Ababio and Grant 2019).

Methodology

In this study, qualitative phenomenology was used as the research methodology. Phenomenology refers to the form of qualitative research that focuses on individual experiences and navigation of the social world (Groenewald 2004). Therefore, its application in this study was relevant because of the need to reveal and understand how planners make sense of their identity and role in their quest to respond to the evolving civic, socio-economic practices, needs and demands in public open spaces. The use of qualitative phenomenology allowed the study of the planner and to acknowledge that their everyday activities ‘emanate from systems of historically contingent meanings communicated by institutionalised patterns of behaving, thinking and speaking’ about the public open spaces in their context (Tenorio 2011, 192). Therefore, throughout the data collection phase of the research, it was important to acknowledge that the planners’ thoughts and actions were manifestations of the complex and dynamic context in which they work.

This paper is part of a larger project that began in 2018, as such, the methodology made use of; (1) participant observations in selected public spaces in the city, (2) multiple focus groups discussions, and (3) individual in-depth interviews with public planning officials involved in the Open Space Management division within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. It must be mentioned that the consulted planners were working in directorate and management positions. Therefore, they served as the representatives of those working within their units and provided a bird’s eye view to the processes of public space provision and management in the city. As such, the findings presented a macro perspective. Participant observations allowed the researchers to gain experience of the public spaces under study, to observe the different practices, users, and activities. Furthermore, it facilitated the iterative processes required by the qualitative approach, and encouraged the follow-up of unexpected ideas from the ground. This ensured that the data collection phase was intertwined and not successive. The focus group session and interviews were used to obtain in-depth descriptions about events and processes on an individual and group level. The data was analysed thematically and relied on the

interrogation of the planners' experiences and narratives about the context in which they work, their views on the value of local ideas in decision-making processes, and the existing institutional context of management and the implication on deliberative practices.

Findings and discussions

The findings presented in this paper focus specifically on (1) how the selected planners navigate their everyday public space provision and management activities in the city, and (2) how they make sense of their identity and role in their quest to respond to the ever-evolving nature of the space in which they work. Using deliberative theory as an anchor, the findings demonstrate that the planners under study face the challenge of rediscovering the centre of planning within public open space processes. Planners are faced with political and institutional pressure that implicate their day-to-day activities, creating a defensible space in which they hide. As such, planners rely on creating pseudo-representations of space as a way to mimic deliberative processes. Finally, the paper argues that planners need to re-set the agenda in an attempt to realize the true successes of deliberative processes in public open space provision and management.

Rediscovering the center

According to Shipley (2002), visioning in planning processes became popular in the 1980s and 90s. It was presented as a 'communicative strategy' closely linked to processes of participation and consultation. Traditionally, the concept refers to a dream or outcome that an organization or an institution aspires to (Mintzberg et al. 1998). It encompasses the guiding ideas and principles in relation to what needs to be done to reach the desired outcomes. Furthermore, a vision asserts that which is important and assists in creating a pattern for strategic action and activities (Hodgkinson 2002). Accordingly, processes of visioning require the involvement of those interested and affected to deliberate on shared objectives (Shipley 2002). This traditional understanding is also shared by the City of Tshwane planning officials who were interviewed. During the focus group discussions, it was clear that the officials participating were well aware of the value of an anchored vision that could be shared not only within their department and institution, but within the communities that they serve, and the private developers which they work with. However, during the discussion, it became apparent that the officials were not communicating the vision to each other. The officials kept referring to what they termed the 'unspoken vision' which they said was the rationale behind all their efforts and projects. Additionally, upon prompting on the processes followed to arrive at the vision, it seemed the officials did not understand how it came about. Moreover, this 'unspoken vision' was different for every respondent interviewed.

“There is an unspoken vision of what we want to see ... like ... to create sustainable communities” (Respondent 1)

“But then the vision ... there is no real vision. Because we come from different perspectives, from our perspective, we provide the land through requesting developers to leave open spaces for parks” (Respondent 2)

These direct quotes from the officials suggest that there is a disjuncture in what the vision is, how it is framed and how it is shared. According to Shackleton and Njwaxu (2021), without future-oriented discussions on values, goals and visions, the success of a public open spaces to its community is hampered. As such, the practices of sharing information, listening and

reasoning between society and officials as encouraged in deliberative practices is vital in the realization of public spaces that respond to the needs and demand of society.

The reoccurring stumbling blocks that officials kept referring to in light of why a vision had not been crystallized, was the existing public open space backlog fashioned by the apartheid government. The apartheid government did not provide sufficient public open spaces in non-white communities (Fataar, 2017; McConnachie and Shackleton 2010; Venter et al. 2020). Officials narrated that they are still faced with the challenges of eradicating this backlog amidst trying to meet the ever-increasing demands for new public open spaces. Consequently, they invest no time into conceptualizing the specific vision for their mandate.

“But then the vision, there is no real vision ... I think the challenge is that, there has been no time to think of a vision because we are in a hurry to catch up with the backlog ... ” (Respondent 1)

Additionally, another respondent attributed the lack of a vision to the fact that municipalities hold municipal elections every five years and as a result, some municipalities find themselves having to change administrations as per the results of the elections. This implies that different administrations come with different priority areas that may or may not paralyze some initiatives or perpetuate some inconsistencies.

“The priorities change from government to government and with that comes issues of prioritisation and we always have to re-strategise and define our vision. The municipality currently has an open space framework which has an aim, however we as a department and section don't have a vision. We currently don't have a plan or master plan for the development of public open spaces” (Respondent 3)

To locate deliberative processes in planning practices more specifically in the context of public open space, visioning requires taking into consideration the needs of not only the department but all those affected by the decisions being made (Perna 2017). The lack of visioning in this regard reflects the challenging environment that planners conduct their everyday activities, and the limitations in which they face in implementing deliberative practices. According to Anguelovski et al. (2016), planners are constantly trying to consolidate the needs of the previously disadvantaged communities, whilst also trying to cater for the needs of emerging communities within cities. Moreover, there is the constant challenge of trying to appease the vested political interests that are constantly injected and re-injected into matters of public interest (Kamete 2009). Amidst all these challenges that the department is facing, there is a need for the officials to rediscover their centre in terms of establishing a common vision informed by the communities in which they serve. This requires deliberating with all affected and interested parties that will defy traditional state-led articulation of citizenship.

Defensible space

According to Robbins (2014), since the dawn of democracy, municipalities have made great strides with reforming municipal systems. Even though this is the case, municipalities are constantly facing budget constraints, which impede on policy implementation outcomes (Munzhedzi 2020). In the city of Tshwane, there seems to be a general perception of institutional and financial constraints that inhibit deliberative processes,

“I don’t know how to put it but maybe to be blunt, like I am saying it’s like fixing a moving bus, the demand is too high even the conceptualisation of the fact that of understanding why such things happen there is no time to think about that” (Respondent 1)

Baum (2015) alludes to how spatial planners’ emotions and unconscious thinking plays a critical role in how they engage in practice and notices a resistance to engage emotionally. Mouffe (2000) regards this as a limitation to deliberative practices, as emotions are conveniently regarded as irrational in planning processes. Because of this perception, planning processes do not embody the adequate space and time for planners to unpack the institutional reality as mentioned by Respondent 1. This lack of embodiment, Gunder and Mouat (2002) describe as symbolic violence and institutional victimization within planning practices, which alludes to ‘state’s planning regimes allow[ing] no elements of choice, or freedom to resist’. These ‘soul-numbing day to day tasks’ (Oranje 2014) and institutional victimization become central to re-enforcing the ‘rational identity’ (Baum 2015) and silencing of the planner,

The planning officials in turn feel powerless (Forester 1982; Oranje 2014) instead of internalizing and confronting their institutional victimization they deflect through attributing their ‘failures’ to ‘budget constraints, lack of capacity, community having unrealistic expectations, political will and addressing the backlog’. Thus, planners and their institutional victimization have created a defensive space from which planners design, develop and manage public open spaces. Forester (1999) and Mouffe (2000) therefore urge planners to not only understand the needs of those they plan for during micro-deliberative practices but also to recognize their own emotions upon the engagement as learning opportunities calling for emotional attuned planning practice.

Pseudo representation

The key to deliberative planning and processes is the opening up of communication between planning officials and the communities in which they plan for (Sager 2002). In South Africa, community participation and consultation is statutorily bound; thus, there is support and guidelines for such processes (Shackleton and Njwaxu 2021). However, what separates micro-deliberative planning processes from mere community consultation processes is that; deliberation requires the planning officials and designers to exchange ideas with the locals (Button and Mattson 1999; Lafont 2015). It is not only about listening to the demands of the people, or a talk-centric exercise, but it is also about sharing expertise and reasoning with the community. This inevitably requires the direct contact of the planner and the community. The rationale is that, in as much as the community can express their needs, experiences, expectations, they can also learn from the planner and vice-versa (Perna 2017). This can be referred to as the sharing of expert and experiential knowledge.

Unfortunately, the occasions in which communities directly meet with the planners that plan for them is rare. Many see this process of meeting and engaging with communities as cumbersome and unmanageable and thus avoid it as captured during an individual interview with an official.

“The moment you open it up as officials to communities, then you complicate things for yourself because they will ask for everything. So rather have their councillor or their community leader doing consultations” (Respondent 4)

This indicates that officials hold certain perceptions about communities and these perceptions hinder the processes of micro deliberation, and go against the grain of the role and identity of the planner. The role of the planner/planning is both a design, socio-economic and political activity, that is premised on processes of public decision making on the future of communities (Fischler, 2012). This resonates with Backer's (2017) view that deliberative processes face the limitation of the willingness or unwillingness to listen to others, based on different positionalities presented by those involved in the process of deliberation. As a result, the reliance of planning officials on political ward councillors is witnessed. Ward councillors in South African municipalities provide the bridge between communities and their local council. Therefore, they are democratically elected to serve as representatives of the people who live in their ward or division.

The planners assert that the communities approach them with unreasonable expectations of public open spaces, and therefore the councillor is the one who is able to consolidate those expectations and deliberate to community accordingly. This reliance alienates the planners from the socio-spatial realities of communities and therefore impacts on the approaches and instruments that planners employ to their work (Oteng-Ababio and Grant 2019; Kamete 2012). As indicated in Figure 1 below, the park management tool as represented by the rules and regulations board, visible in the park is ostracized from the socio-spatial realities of communities on the ground. In turn, communities resist against the instrument used by planners to regulate the space as it does not resonate with their day-to-day public open space practices, represented in Figure 2. Subsequent to this, the involvement of councillors by the planners is seen as a way to ensure that communities are represented, however in many instances, councillors are seen as representing the interests of their political parties and not representing the needs of communities (Piper and Deacon 2009). This form of consultative political process, where the aim is to establish the listed needs of a community perpetuates pathologies which do not yield clear directives. Furthermore, it presents planners as merely 'problem fixers' who are disengaged (Kamete 2013). However, micro-deliberative processes call for not only 'problem fixing' but also the sharing of information and knowledge on an open-ended basis. In essence, the use of councillors can be regarded as a limitation to deliberative planning in the form of pseudo representation of communities as opposed to legitimate representation that would be attained through direct contact of planners and communities.



Figure 1. Image represents the municipal rules and regulations board for Jubilee Park (specific attention to no trading).



Figure 2. Image represents the contradiction/resistance by Jubilee Park users.

Planners: re-setting the agenda

As discussed earlier in this paper, the city of Tshwane has emphasized the need to redress the injustices of the past, through the development and provision of public open spaces in previously disadvantaged communities (Landman 2018).

“ ... Although in the past township planning allocated spaces for parks, they were not developed as parks, so they were just there as open spaces, overgrown and many people would just go there and cut grass. They were not developed ... The main focus there was houses and not street scraping or open spaces.” (Respondent 5)

Some planning officials expressed the difficulty of responding to the needs of these previously disadvantaged communities due to the misunderstanding of the purpose of these spaces and how they are to be managed. For instance, officials lamented how these previously disadvantaged communities are yet to take ownership of the public open spaces provided for them. The assumption shared by the officials is that because of previous deprivations, there is limited consensus on the value of these spaces. According to Shackleton and Njwaxu (2021), the officials have a role to play in facilitating processes of community ownership, through involving communities in different stages of the development of public open spaces. Accordingly, this can be done through micro-deliberative processes, where perspectives on use, value and ownership are presented for public opinion, that will influence management practices and future developments of public open space in specific contexts.

“Because the people who benefit more are the kids, some of them especially in the township areas have never seen outdoor gym equipment. Some parks are developed in an informal settlement, where the intended user has never seen play equipment not even at a crèche. So they have never had the opportunity to play with this equipment, learn about them and interact with others in that space.” (Respondent 3)

The quest undertaken by planners to facilitate the public open space that is characterized by unfamiliar equipment (as expressed in the quote above) within the community, becomes pertinent within micro-deliberative practices. This facilitation requires the planner to deliberate a collective understanding of vision, function and meaning of the public open space. However, what becomes problematic is when planners impose an outdoor gym, and demand communities take ownership of an already set public open space agenda. The absence of micro-deliberation results in misinformed, assumed and convenient functions and uses of spatial interventions, which results in processes of intervention that run parallel with processes of delivery and in so doing, dispossesses the community. This becomes the ‘oblivious space’, where forms of deliberation end, and interpretative usages are open-ended. Facilitation of the interface becomes critical for future planning practices through establishing deliberative processes between the communities and the planners, where expectations, needs and ideas can be shared (Calderon and Westin 2021). This reiterates once again the importance of the social agenda (i.e., micro-deliberative agenda) that is necessary in planning processes and assists in removing the veil that creates a barrier between the planner and the community.

Conclusion

Micro-deliberative practices require not only theoretical guidelines provided by frameworks and theory but intentional, emotional convictions encountered by planners in their engagements with communities. Another point raised in the literature and confirmed by this research is that

planning is an intentional iterative process, informed by both the rational identity of planners that is characterized by technical expert knowledge on the one hand, and meaningful local deliberation characterized by experiential contextual knowledge on the other. However, what the findings suggest is that; planners are aware of their mandate as it pertains to public open spaces, they are familiar with the challenges that diversity poses on planning and its processes, however they choose to dwell in the defensible space as it provides for solace and services the profession's legitimacy. Consequently, public open spaces mirror more than mere design interventions and aesthetic considerations but represents planning practices undertaken. Central to this debate is the duty and responsibility that the planner has towards re-setting the agenda and the importance of deliberation in matters of common good, such as the public open spaces in which society inevitably encounters. The functional, need and transitional nature of public open spaces in diverse societies calls for future planning practices that acknowledges that the planning profession relies on an emotional engagement with the socio-spatial imagination. Upon reflection, this brings to the surface questions for future research pertaining to the ways in which planners in constricted jurisdictions can incorporate time for 'thinking and reasoning' in planning decisions, approaches and processes. In addition, there is a need to begin thinking through the 'rules of engagement' through the lens of micro-deliberative processes with the emphasis on practical viability.

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